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SUBJECT: PUBLIC AFFAIRS INFLUENCE ANALYSIS: SLOVENIA

REF: STATE 33359

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1. (SBU) Summary. Slovenia has a very open information environment in which there is little, if any, overt censorship. The media are critical and react strongly against any perceived attempts to influence the tenor of their reporting. Nevertheless, they often fall short of journalistic standards of professionalism by blatantly mixing fact and opinion in their stories. The media also exhibit a strong left-of-center bias. This "social democratic" orientation is common to Slovenian academia and the NGO sector as well, and is reflected within the broader public, which welcomes American individuals and culture but remains critical of our foreign and (many of our) domestic policies.

2. (SBU) Summary cont'd. Generating influence with our policymaking audience requires tailoring our message to Slovenes' sense of national interest. The policymaking establishment is very legalistic and will typically strive to achieve consensus on major policy issues, even if it means hindering or delaying policy resolution. To influence the broader public, we use the full range of PD tools and programs. We believe strongly in creatively using all the resources at our disposal to promote mutual understanding in hopes of gradually chipping away at the knee-jerk reaction our policies elicit in the media and within certain parts of Slovene society. End summary.

3. (SBU) Slovenia is a parliamentary democracy and constitutional republic, which provides for freedom of speech and of the press. The information environment in many areas is very open. Internet access rates are high, and government offices and private institutions have excellent and sophisticated websites. Thus, Post can do a great deal of outreach and IRC work via the e-mail and the Internet.

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Media Environment  
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4. (SBU) The media environment in Slovenia, however, is more difficult. It is complex and often opaque, very critical of the U.S., with major print media displaying a pronounced and admitted left-of-center bias. Slovenia's recent history, combining communism and Tito's concept of "self-management," has resulted in journalists who distrust governments in general, are quick to label information propaganda, jealously guard their independence, and see adopting an extremely critical stance as a natural part of their watchdog role and a way to make a name for themselves. Too, when the press suspects it is being "spun," it often reacts strongly and in the opposite direction.

5. (SBU) The above, combined with a uniform leftist bias (especially in the major national print media -- there are no right-leaning dailies), strong anti-American policy rhetoric, a deep identification with Europe (vs. America), deliberate efforts to be provocative, and journalists' almost "allergic reaction" to the Bush administration, makes for a very hostile media environment for Embassy public affairs. There is also a surfeit of editorials in the press and a tendency to mix straight reporting with editorial comment. In addition, editorial writers seem to gather the news from secondary sources and compose their articles almost exclusively from what appear to be their own ideas and commentary, without than fleshing them out or substantiating them with outside quotes or ideas gleaned from interviews and other sources (like, for example, Tom Friedman of the New York Times). Investigative journalism as practiced in the U.S. also is not as developed in Slovenia, partially because editors are reluctant or unable to allow reporters to spend weeks developing, researching, and following a single story. The fact that access to information laws are new here and, in general, less information from government, individuals and companies is the public domain also affects reporting.

16. (SBU) The U.S. is also a large and easy target, and any journalist wanting to criticize U.S. policy only has to mention the Kyoto Agreement, the ICC and/or Guantanamo to score a point. Media ownership is difficult to determine, as are exact political and economic pressures, which allegedly affect media reporting and result in some self-censorship.

17. (SBU) Public station TV Slovenia competes for viewership in the national television market with

commercial station POP TV, and like most public TV stations in the region, has lost market share to POP and other cable stations. While occasionally criticized for pro-government bias from some quarters, TV Slovenia news is trusted and watched. National radio news (hourly) is also popular. Because of its public mandate to educate, TV and Radio Slovenia have more news and public affairs programs on foreign policy issues, so we frequently turn to them when we have exclusive interviews and NATO or FPC tours, as they afford these stories more time and attention than commercial stations.

18. (SBU) Despite criticism from some quarters, media in Slovenia enjoy a high degree of public trust. Monthly polling consistently puts media among the most trusted institutions. While it is criticized and considered still to be in transition in some quarters, clearly, it is accepted by the general public. Opposition figures, however, complain about media access and the fact that there are no center right dailies.

19. Major media turn out for Embassy press conferences, but judge all events with a very critical eye and attendance is by no means automatic or guaranteed. The Mission can occasionally place op-eds, but with only three serious national dailies, all of which are left-of-center and cautious about taking our material. We have to prioritize our placement efforts carefully and can take none for granted. Also, the media here is looking for news and doesn't always consider messages on U.S. policy, which are relatively known and stable, to be news. Naturally, pieces by well-known figures, offered as Slovenia exclusives, are somewhat easier to place. When we do place op-eds, papers often feel the need to quickly counter USG editorials with opposing pieces by local commentators and writers. Saturday supplements of major dailies are full of opinion and long "think" pieces by academics and local experts.

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The Slovene public  
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10. Many of our contacts and Slovene society, in general, might be described in U.S. terms as social democratic at heart, and many probably agree with the press's criticism of U.S. policy. But often (or maybe just in person) they are not as strident. Despite the press, Slovenes generally like and accept Americans and still admire and enjoy many aspects of American culture and society. It is clear, however, when we go to the universities for discussions or debates that media criticism is being read and does have an effect on attitudes and our programming environment. Non-state actors do play a role in media and policymaking. University professors regularly write pieces for print media and are frequent guests on television talk shows, as are NGO representatives. Many are from the center-left of the political spectrum, however, so do not contradict the general left-of-center media bias.

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Identifying our Target Audience  
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11. (SBU) The primary audience for our MPP goal of encouraging Slovenia to promote political, economic and military reform in central and southeastern Europe consists of government policymakers, parliamentarians, members of the judiciary, military leaders, the media, academia, NGOs, and the general public. Some of the critical NGOs in this area include the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF), the Regional Center for the Psychosocial Well-Being of War-Affected Children in Southeastern Europe, and the Institution for Preventing Corruption. The newly founded NGO "Forum 21" may also prove to be a critical lobby.

12. (SBU) The main audience in the MPP goal area of improving Slovenia's ability to detect, interdict, prosecute and convict persons involved in transnational criminal and terrorist activities includes, in addition to the above groups, members of the police, customs, and

border guards.

13. (SBU) The primary audience in the MPP goal area of encouraging transparency, open markets, further privatization, and respect for the rule of law consists of policymakers in the Ministry of Finance and Economics, business leaders, financial institutions, and trade associations such as the Council of American States in

Europe (CASE), AmCham Europe, and the Slovenia-U.S. Trade Promotion Board.

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The Policymaking Audience  
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14. (SBU) Communication with our policymaking audience takes the form of demarches and official visits by senior Mission officers as well as interpersonal communication in less formal settings. Our IRC also makes contact with this audience and regularly reaches out by providing SDI profiles, e-newsletters, and other information products and by responding to inquiries for information on the u.s. Our ability to influence our contacts is contingent first on establishing cordial and professional relationships. Slovene policymakers understand that their national interest lies in promoting regional stability, counter-terrorism and anti-crime measures, and our stress on the congruence of their interests with ours generally leads to the greatest receptivity to our policies. Policymakers in particular have a keen and calculated sense of national interest that usually overrides the sometimes emotional sway one finds in the media or in academia. Another important attribute of the Slovenian policymaking community is the tendency to seek consensus on major policy issues. The close link between political and economic elites and the "networked" nature of Slovenian society result in a desire to burn as few bridges as possible and achieve maximal consensus. On major issues like NATO accession, this fervent desire for consensus has at times caused considerable delays in moving policies forward. It has also on various occasions severely complicated the policymaking process and put obstacles in the way of achieving a necessary resolution.

15. (SBU) Communication with the current GOS leadership requires attention to a few details. First, PM Rop's interest in public policy is piqued whenever it is couched in terms of Slovenia's economic growth and development. Rop's primary interest is clearly economic policy and he often frames foreign and security policy issues from an economist's perspective. Second, the GOS leadership reportedly pays close attention to opinion polls and has even commissioned special polls for its own internal consumption.

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Our broader audience  
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16. (SBU) In terms of our wider audience--the media, academia, NGOs, and the judiciary--post uses the full panoply of PD tools and programs in order to reach out to these groups. The Fulbright, Humphrey, IV programs, and NATO tours have enabled us to gain considerable access to senior administrators and influential voices in academia as well as to top officials in NGOs and the judiciary. These programs have generally had positive effects, although Slovenes have a historically-conditioned skepticism of government programs that makes them assume some programs must entail propaganda. Returned Fulbright and IV grantees often tell us about the high quality of their U.S. program and are invariably impressed with the diversity of views they encounter. Some grantees have even mentioned that their visit forced them to re-evaluate preconceived notions about the U.S. and led them to completely change their position on a given issue. Even without such wholesale change, however, returned grantees usually come back with a better understanding of the U.S. and a greater appreciation for how American society is organized and how public policies are made. Nevertheless, skepticism of current U.S. policy often remains firmly entrenched.

17. (SBU) Our Information Resource Center (IRC) provides information on the u.s. to the general public through our Mission web site, targeted dissemination of information, and also upon request. The IRC continuously engages in the promotion and marketing of our website to a wider audience and conducts briefings to encourage wider dissemination of our information products. The IRC director also manages the Embassy's book donation program and designs promotional materials and develops marketing strategies highlighting IRC products, programs, and services. Speakers from the u.s. also provide our wider audience with a valuable third-party perspective and help promote

greater appreciation of u.s. society, culture, and institutions within Slovenia. Again, however, there is often a tendency to assume that speakers who come to Slovenia on an Embassy-sponsored program must have had their message pre-cleared. Because it is so difficult to

find third parties in Slovenia who would represent a pro-U.S. position, speaker programs nevertheless remain the tool of choice for voicing third-party perspectives. Targeted DVCs also provide a valuable link between policymakers in the U.S. and in Slovenia and have in some cases led to remarkably long-lasting collaborative relationships, as in the case of several Slovene judges who participated in a DVC with Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy. DVCs for the media must be carefully selected and judiciously used, however, since the media needs to feel they are getting useful information and a story out of the time and effort they put into attending the event.

18. (SBU) Post engages the media and the general public by extensively using the Ambassador for interviews and appearances. We also take advantage of almost all USG visits for media opportunities to get our message out. We try to creatively use events to engage our audiences and to build trust and mutual understanding, whether it be with a ship visit, US Women's Fed Cup tennis, reception, or private student exchange. Finally, cultural grants and cultural programming provide us with access to a very useful set of contacts in the cultural community and help sustain a positive image of the U.S. even in the face of critical media coverage.

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COMMENT/CONCLUSION  
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19. (SBU) The left-of-center orientation of the Slovene media and of much of Slovenian society will continue to produce criticism of our foreign policy. Post will continue to engage our policymaking audience and the broader public by remaining highly visible and programming events that portray the U.S. in a positive light and counter negative views and misunderstandings of our policies. We will continue to look for creative ways to draw attention to our values and to broaden Slovenes' understanding of our policies and the motivations behind them. Recent program events like our collaboration with the U.S. Women's Fed Cup Tennis Team to raise money for children mine victims received wide press coverage and portrayed the U.S. very positively. By combining an auction of tennis equipment with a COM speech about how the U.S. tax system encourages charitable giving and volunteerism, we also got our message across about the importance of allowing market institutions to function in an unfettered and transparent manner. Our programs must creatively reach out to our (many) audiences to showcase our diversity, openness, individualism and hard work. We will build on recent efforts that include sponsorship of a film highlighting the diversity of U.S. society in the Ljubljana film festival, promotion of U.S. counter-TIP efforts through the screening of a feature film, and a COM visit to a local school for Deaf and hearing-impaired students. Our continued presence and high visibility in such programs will mitigate the negative coverage we receive on some policy issues and provide better context for and understanding of our motivations. End comment.

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